

HANDS OFF RUSSIA.

SPEECH BY

MR. ISRAEL ZANGWILL

AT THE ALBERT HALL,

FEBRUARY 8th, 1919

PRICE 2d

**PUBLISHED BY THE WORKERS SOCIALIST
FEDERATION,**

400 Old Ford Road, London E3.

S.F.N. P.V. R.K.M.
11/20/19

HANDS OFF RUSSIA.

TO avoid obtaining applause under false pretences, let me confess at once that I speak as a bourgeois with hard-earned savings and not as a Bolshevik. Bolshevik, I understand, means one of the majority, and that is, alas! a position I have never had the comfort to occupy. I speak from your platform because you have offered me it, and I would as cheerfully hold forth in the House of Lords if they gave me facilities. I do not belong to the Red Army, unless you will spell it "Read."

Do not despise that "Read" Army—Lenin himself compares newspapers to bombs and guns, and thought it so dangerous that no Government in the world dares leave it uncensored. Even he has suppressed the opposition press, I am sorry to say. But I was relieved to find the suppression described as a temporary and extraordinary measure till the new order was firmly in the saddle. But he would have done better to leave the press free, especially as the Russian masses cannot read.

It is *our* press that is Lenin's real danger. A Muscovite when he reads that the gutters of Moscow run blood, knows whether the blood is really there, or only invented by the gutter-journalists. But we over here in the fog of peace, can never be absolutely sure that our journals are lying. The other day, I saw an article headed "Russian Dangers." On looking more closely I saw it was only "Russian Dancers." But so hypnotised was my brain by the popular chorus: "Hush, hush, hush, here comes the Bolshevik," that I read it even into a eulogy of the only good thing now admitted to come out of Russia—its ballet.

What a difference from the beginning of the war! Then, when I read about Archangel, I thought it was the Czar. Those were the days of Stephen Graham and 'Holy Russia' and Russian Supplements of *The Times*. On the first anniversary of the war, Count Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador, emphasised on behalf of Czar and people "the hearty and constant union of views between Russia and Great Britain and the continued confidence and faith which each has in the other." In those days, for saying a word against Russia I was denounced as a pro-German. Now the danger is to say a word *for* Russia.

This is in one way a blessing: for now that Russia has taken the place of Germany as the enemy of the human race, now that Bolshevism is, in the language of Lord Denbigh, "a curse in com-

parison with which German militarism would have been a blessing," now that at Riga the Eighth German Army has actually co-operated with our troops against the Bolsheviks, there has been a relaxation in our iniquitous blockade against Germany. Just as the Bolsheviks, by undermining German morale, helped to save us from Prussian militarism, so they are now helping to save us from ourselves.

Moreover, they have so frightened Capital that everywhere wages are rising—even in the Army and Navy, hours of work are falling, and the Peace Conference is offering Labour an international charter. The fear of Bolshevism is the beginning of wisdom. Bolshevism may be a curse, but its evil is by no means unmingled.

But is Bolshevism a curse? Well, we must distinguish between Bolshevism in itself and the violence with which it has been established. As a conscientious objector to violence of every species, I do not believe that revolutions can be made only with blood, I believe they can be made with ink, or with electric light. But revolution with blood is not unknown even in English history and violence in Russia is not confined to the Bolsheviks. In recording the court-martialing and shooting of 117 Bolsheviks near Omsk, *The Times* remarked recently: "These prompt measures have made a good impression." But you cannot in the same breath praise violence and abuse it.

It is impossible to whitewash the Bolsheviks, but I have no doubt that the bloodiness of their régime has been as exaggerated as its bankruptcy. If the possessing classes in England were suddenly deprived by the masses of their lands and factories, and even turned out of their homes, I should not go to them for an impartial view of the situation, nor expect them to recognise that, once things had settled down, Britain as a whole might really be better off. When Mr. Lloyd George was denounced for "robbing hen-roosts," I did not accept that as a complete account of his politics. Lord Milner prates of "the unspeakable horrors of Bolshevik rule," but I was not so ready to believe all that the Boers said about his concentration camps. Quite a number of those murdered by the Bolsheviks seem to pop up again.

But when all is said, it is unquestionable that infinite injustice and brutality have marked the Bolshevik as every other revolution, including the revolution against the Czar, which the British Government endorsed. I do not doubt that the same Russian hooligans who carried out the brutalities of the army in Galicia, or the Jewish pogroms against which the British Government refused to intervene, profited by their new and rich opportunities to carry out those horrors against which the British Government has been so

anxious to intervene : horrors which for the most part, indeed, were the very result of our intervention. Had we recognised Lenin's Government as we recognised Kerensky's, instead of trying both secretly and openly to subvert it, Bolshevism would have been comparatively bloodless. But it was forced to stand with its back to the wall against the whole world. This animal, as Buffon puts it, is very spiteful : when you attack it, it defends itself.

The latest excuse for intervention is that Bolshevism has replaced Prussianism in aggressive and invasive militarism. But, as the books of strategy teach, attack is often the best form of defence. In the classic language of Barney Barnato, when you see a man about to hit you, you hit him first. But Russia must be saved from the Bolsheviks, the defeated Russian parties tell us. "For reasons of high morality," cries M. Savinkoff, the head of the Omsk military mission to Paris, "it is an international duty to put an end to the odious massacres which mark the Red Terror." Who is this M. Savinkoff, this preacher of high morality, now in such high honour in Paris? The man who, according to his own 'Confessions,' recently published in Bourzeff's organ *Biloie*, was, together with the *provocateur* Aseff, at the head of the Terrorist branch of the Social Revolutionaries ; the man who, though at one with Lenin in his land policy, would have none of Lenin's constitutional methods ; the man who in 1908 took part in an attempt to assassinate the Czar, and who actually handed the bomb which killed the Grand Duke Sergius. This is indeed an example of Satan rebuking sin.

As for the Great Powers that M. Savinkoff exhorts to intervene against Bolshevik violence, why even the greatest and noblest of them, President Wilson, has preached : "Force, force without stint, force to the utmost limit." Though he now sits high on the fence, smiling like Sunny Jim, force is the food that raised up him. When I last stood on this platform, nearly two years ago, it was to complain that a mass of men just about equal to the audience in this vast hall was being murdered and mutilated every day, and that this incredible Red Terror had been going on for nigh a thousand days. Nevertheless it went on for another five hundred days, and Lord Curzon has regretted it did not go on a little longer. Those who objected to taking a hand in it were put away and tortured like John Maclean. Therefore, pacifist though I am, I feel that when the Allies presume to lecture Trotsky and Lenin, these men are entitled to reply : "Mind your own bloody business."

The truth is we wanted more bloodshed, not less, and if the Bolsheviks instead of nobly pro-

posing an all-round peace with "no annexations, no indemnities," had continued the war, we should have swallowed our objections to their doctrine, and even if to raise the sinews of war they had expropriated every rouble in Russia, we should have applauded the patriotic dictation of the proletariat. The Peace Conference, which is now pulling the leg of nations, the Peace Conference with its President whose nickname of the Tiger preserves the law of the jungle, would have welcomed Lenin and Trotsky to its table. Now they are told to go to Prinkipo.

We must do Lloyd George the justice to admit it was not he who wanted them to wait on the mat. Perhaps he has had his lesson. 'Through Terror to Triumph' was the name of a collection of his speeches. Perhaps he has come now 'Through Triumph to Terror.' For the Knock-out Blow he insisted on has been given—but by Russia. Whoever meddles with Russia seems to catch a Tartar. Russia baffled Napoleon by a new tactic and she may yet baffle Foch. For she has transformed the strife of nations into a conflict of classes and the war that was won horizontally may be lost perpendicularly.

The whole social order is rocking from China to Peru. But if our politicians didn't want the world's foundations to shake, why did they stake all its fortunes on the Knock-out Blow? They knew how the Napoleonic wars had left all Europe rumbling with revolution. Why did they gag and blind us, stifle every gleam of reason and every impulse of humanity, set black and yellow against white, refusing to look beyond the murderous moment, abandoning the planet for five years to blood-lust, frenzy, and famine?

Victory covers a multitude of sins, but it cannot avert their consequences. You cannot sow the wind and reap the doldrums. Bolshevism followed as naturally from that saturnalia of savagery and that agony of starvation as the Black Death, camouflaged as Spanish influenza, rose from the myriads of putrefying corpses. "Comrades," cried a simple Russian soldier back from the front, "I bring you greetings from the spot where men are digging their own graves and call them trenches." The Russian soldiers wanted peace, the peasants land, the citizens bread. It was an irresistible triad.

I regret their methods. I would not have raised a finger to help them. But now that they have helped themselves I would not undo their work. That would be a waste of the blood already shed, the destruction of a precious social experiment, an experiment moreover made not upon us but on the vile body of Russia. Bolshevism must be let alone. If it is a curse let it go home to roost. If

it is a blessing, let the whole world enjoy it. If Trotski is a greater tyrant than the Czar, let him meet a similar doom; if Lenin is worse than Wilhelm, let the Russians deport him.

If, as Sasonoff tells us, all the shops of Moscow are empty and all the prisons full; if the peasants complain they are worse off under the tyranny of the committees than under the single employer of yore; if, as the Swiss [pamphleteers inform us, Bolshevism has meant the blind destruction of forests, crops, raw materials, and a calamitous exodus from the cities; if under the Soviets Russia is without bread, commerce, manufactures, or freedom, what an invaluable lesson for other would-be Bolsheviks!

Why intervene to destroy what is destroying itself? Why, like Gilbert's Mikado, make suicide a capital offence? To destroy Bolshevism from without would only destroy the value of this awful warning. For Bolsheviks would then always say it died of violence, not of its own rottenness.

As it is, they say it has not had a fair chance, that the experiment was made in a country already ruined by the capitalists and their war, a famished country, a country now isolated politically and boycotted economically. They say it was not Bolshevism that brought the bankruptcy of Russia, but the bankruptcy of Russia that brought Bolshevism. And as a matter of fact what is the use of pointing to Russia's disorganisation and destitution? The whole Continent groaneth and travaileth. You cannot spend £40,000,000,000 to destroy another £40,000,000,000, and denude Europe of ten million able-bodied producers and then have peace and plenty.

According to Gorki, whose slow conversion to Bolshevism makes his evidence all the more valuable, Bolshevism is not the scourge it first seemed, but a sincere striving for "the freedom and beauty of life." And so it is. Who can object to a Constitution, one of whose first articles declares that "He who will not work shall not eat"? True, there seems a somewhat crude interpretation of work. I have spent weeks of study to find out the truth about Bolshevism. Is not that work—and useful work?

The Bolsheviks, it appears, set artists to clean out lavatories: still we sent Epstein to the trenches. They despise professors and set up street universities in the shape of posters of information. A crazy idea! say the critics. I am inclined to think it an improvement on the posters of our picture palaces.

I am far from supposing Bolshevism was born perfect; in fact, it is still in travail, a revolution still in evolution, a birth that is half an abortion, a chaos of capitalism and socialism, of idealism and materialism, of wisdom and folly. But the

same study that convinces me of its crudities and cruelties convinces me also that by its heroic attempt to make bread and education as common as air, by its aspiration for a world brotherhood and a world peace, by its repudiation of the imperialism that is based on the exploitation of coloured races, by its grand gesture of restoring to China and Persia the territories grabbed by the old Russia, it is the first attempt in history to create a model Commonwealth.

It is true that in attempting to set up by force this kingdom of peace and goodwill, Bolshevism has fallen into the paradox of all military crusades. It is true that to destroy poverty it has ruthlessly impoverished the rich. But just as after five years of world slaughter my dulled nerves can no longer be shocked by Bolshevik bloodshed, so after my own Government has taken annually a fourth of my income, forcibly borrowed my stocks, commandeered without compensation hotels in which I might have had a share, threatened through Bonar Law a levy on my capital, nationalised railways and shipping, and told me through Mr. Winston Churchill that the achievements of the Ministry of Munitions constitute the greatest argument for State Socialism that has ever been produced, I cannot pump up any horror at a Government which goes a little further and demands to utilise for life and construction, the forces we have devoted so successfully to destruction and death.

The British Government is only Bolshevism in embryo, and Bolshevism is only Socialism in a hurry, Socialism while you won't wait. America, going one better, has Bolshevised the drink trade at one blow. It is a recognition that not property but society is sacred.

Fun has been made of the unceasing flow of Bolshevik decrees, but can they compare with the innumerable progeny of D.O.R.A. who had the indecent fertility of a cod-fish, and is still spawning? My refugee Russian friends try to make my flesh creep by telling me what "the dictation of the proletariat" will be like. But I say, my dear friends, as a freelance I shall assuredly not relish it. But I am broken in. I have lived under the British War Government, subject to provisional arrest without reason given; subject, had I been a C.O., to court-martial five times over for the same offence; my correspondence censored, articles and plays of mine forbidden, my journeys impeded by procrastinated passports, or even liable to prohibition by the Soviet of Sailors headed by Mr. Havelock Wilson.

That Soviet now presumes to threaten the Peace Conference itself, if any food is shipped to enemy countries against its views. But the Government cannot tolerate lawlessness when that happens to be on its side, and exclaim against anarchy when

the forces it has unloosed turn against it. And now that a Soviet of dockers in Bristol has retorted in kind by refusing to load up munitions destined for use against Russia, perhaps the Government may perceive that two can play at that game.

But, plead the interventionists, we do not propose to undo the main work of Bolshevism. We know the peasants will never give back the land nor take back a Czar. Only the Black Hundreds still hope for that. And these do not demand Allied help, for they fear the Peace Conference would not give them the Russia they want. That is the most flattering thing I have yet heard about the Peace Conference. But if Bolshevism is thus admitted to be so largely sound and irrevocable, the case for intervention becomes still weaker.

Milner pretends we must remain in Russia to protect those who fought on our side. As if the Bolsheviks would be so foolish as to refuse them an amnesty, if we consented to clear out! The only plausible plea for intervention put forward in any respectable quarter is *The New Europe's* plea that the Peace Conference would be false to its function if it left so large an area of the world a prey to chaos and disorder. But is Paris itself so free from unrest, Paris where prices go up daily and soldiers are forbidden to enter for fear of riots, as they are equally forbidden in Lyons and Marseilles? Only on one condition could the Peace Conference presume to interfere in internal politics—if it does so all round, in Egypt, say, or Ireland, or in the Southern States of America where the negroes are terrorised from recording their votes. Hands off Russia therefore—until they are clean!

But even those who call on the Peace Conference to do its war-duty, no longer dare ask for military expeditions. They know that the peoples, so far from being ready to send fresh forces, are clamouring for the recall of their frozen troops, that we are ashamed of the French negroes in Odessa. The plan now put forward in *The Times* is to starve out the Bolsheviks, while encircling them with well-fed populations, the sight of whose pampered paunches would seduce them from the faith. It is like that ghastly story in Poe when the walls of a steel chamber close gradually upon their victim. Truly a Christian reply to "the horrors of Bolshevism"!

But whence comes this right to blockade Russia? When did we proclaim war on her? Why are we throwing her into the arms of Germany? A truce to this folly! Let us intervene in Russia not with arms or blockades, but with food and friendship! Let us leave Russia the right she has proclaimed for all—the right of self-determination.